

Breathing Techniques

Breathing techniques can help to reduce symptoms of stress. Practicing these techniques will give you the benefit of increasing levels of oxygen in your bloodstream, which will give you physiological benefits along with psychological benefits. Start by practicing at times when you are not feeling stress to make them “easier” to use in times of stress.

For all breathing techniques it is helpful to breathe through the nose to help you get even and controlled breaths. If you are not able to breathe through your nose, or if it is difficult due to congestion or other issues, it is okay to breathe through the mouth.

Diaphragmatic/abdominal breathing.

This technique can be done while sitting, standing or lying down. To begin it can be helpful to place a hand on the abdomen to “feel” the breath filling the abdomen with each inhalation. The goal is to breathe slowly and deeply, filling the abdomen before the inhalation rises to the chest. The chest will move very little when engaging in abdominal breathing. The sensation that you will feel with abdominal breathing is like your stomach is filling up with air like a balloon. Upon exhalation, the abdomen will lower, as if a deflating balloon.

While practicing, it is helpful to set aside five to 10 minutes to engage mindfully in the technique. As your schedule permits, you may want to try this once or twice a day (a good time may be when getting up in the morning and just before bedtime). You can increase time as you become more comfortable with this technique.

Tension relief/awareness breathing.

This technique builds on diaphragmatic breathing. While breathing diaphragmatically, upon each inhalation, say to yourself “breathe in.” Upon each exhalation, say to yourself “breathe out.” You may want to shorten this to simply “in” and “out.” As you inhale, you may notice tension in the body. Bring these feelings into your awareness, and as you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body. When other thoughts or feelings enter your mind, take notice of them and return to “breathe in” and “breathe out.”

The goal of this technique is relaxation, not perfection, so if you do have other thoughts, be kind to yourself and let them flow in and out with your breath. Notice times when it is easier to come back to your breathing and times when it is more difficult. Again, with this technique, you may want to begin by setting aside five to 10-minute segments throughout the day, increasing time as you become more comfortable with the technique.

Sighing and yawning.

These are techniques that we already know how to do! Sighing and yawning are natural ways of releasing tension, and practicing these can give you additional tension relief. When practicing sighing, take in a deep breathe and then “sigh” it out. Make noise! Let the stress out! Repeat this two more times. When practicing yawning, open your mouth wide, stretch out your arms, and yawn. Repeat as necessary.

Here when you need us.

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